

Commissioner Deborah A. Gist's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, February 17, 2012

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2. Panel to discuss [art, design](#) as components of STEM curriculum; examples of student work sought
3. **Reminder:** Lead author of the [Common Core](#), David Coleman, to meet with educators February 29

From the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE):

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Other:

8. [Conference on innovation](#) scheduled for March 13
9. Conference scheduled on [high-school redesign](#)

Attachments to this field memo:

Message to teachers 2-17-12

Action Item Calendar

Today (February 17): Response due on [IMS Survey](#)
Today (February 17): Teacher [Roster Verification](#) due
Friday, February 24: Distribute Commissioner's message to teachers, school leaders (see below)
March 2: Deadline for principals to respond to [evaluation survey](#)
March 5: Application deadline for Common Core implementation grant
March 9: Districts to update data on [students with disabilities](#)
March 9: [Principal Roster](#) signoff due
April 13: Deadline for submitting to RIDE [district Teacher of the Year](#) selections
June 30: Schools and districts submit [final personnel assignments](#)

Notes from Commissioner Gist:

1. Message on NECAP results: Strong assessment results come from great instruction, leadership – *Action Item*

In last week's Field Memo, I shared with you some of my thoughts on the 2011 NECAP results. Today, I am attaching a letter in which I share my thoughts on these results with our teachers and school leaders. As you may know, we invited several school leaders to last week's news conference to speak about how they achieved success. What was truly striking to me was that none emphasized test preparation. Rather, they emphasized planning, instruction, and follow-up work. I want to share the message with as wide an audience as possible.

In the letter I have attached for teachers and school leaders, I note:

Strong assessment results come from great instruction supported by great leadership. As I often say when I speak to community groups, I have never walked into a high-performing school and seen teachers drilling students on test-taking. In high-performing schools, including many I have visited in our state this year, I always see teachers who are focused and engaged and I see students who are joyful and attentive. I see teachers who love teaching and students who love learning.

I appreciate your offer of help in disseminating information to educators in your community. This week, can you please send the attached letter – "Message to teachers 2-17-12" – to all teachers and principals in your schools?

I also want to let your know that we are drafting a letter to parents regarding the 2011 NECAP results and the current graduation requirements. The 2011 results showed that 44 percent of tested high-school students scored *substantially below proficient* in mathematics. This poor showing concerns us deeply, as a similar low performance during the next school year would mean that nearly half of next year's junior class would be in danger of not graduating. I plan to address some of these concerns in a letter to parents, which I will also ask for your help with in dissemination.

Thank you for your help in distributing these important messages.

2. Panel to discuss art, design as components of STEM curriculum; examples of student work sought

Over the past several years, we have worked hard on many initiatives to advance instruction in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), which as we all know are areas of vital importance for success in the 21st-century global economy. Improvements in STEM curriculum and instruction were a major part of our successful Race to the Top application. As

you may be aware, we're beginning to hear conversation around the country on a new element to STEM education: the inclusion of Art, as part of the STEM process, or STEM to STEAM. Given Rhode Island's strong connections to the arts and our own vibrant arts-education community, STEAM is an ideal next step for our state.

President John Maeda, of RISD, has been a national leader on this effort. Next month, I will be participating in a joint presentation, which President Maeda is coordinating, on "Turning STEM to STEAM in Modern Curriculum." We will be talking to a national audience about how art and design can "make science visible" and about the importance of developing in our students the creative discovery skills that lead to true innovation.

I have seen some amazing art and design work across the state, so I would like to center my presentation on an example of student work from Rhode Island. If you can suggest to me any great student project that links art and design with the STEM curriculum, please let me know. I'd love to highlight you and your student's work. I'm looking for an example that is visually compelling, that makes a strong and evident connection between design and STEM, and that I can explain or summarize in just a few sentences.

3. *Reminder: Lead author of the Common Core, David Coleman, to meet with educators February 29*

I want to remind you that, along with the Board of Governors for Higher Education, we have invited David Coleman, one of the lead writers of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), to come to Rhode Island on **February 29** and share his experience and his perspective with us. Mr. Coleman will lead a conversation among district and higher-education leaders called "A Call to Action: State and Local Readiness for CCSS and PARCC," on February 29, from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m., here at RIDE (80 Washington St./255 Westminster St., Providence). If you cannot attend that conversation but would like to hear Mr. Coleman, he will hold a conversation for a more general audience of educators on February 29, from 4 to 5:30 p.m., at the Rhode Island College Student Union Memorial Ballroom, 600 Mount Pleasant Ave., Providence. To register for either session, go to:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/DavidColeman-February29-RSVP>

It promises to be a very informative and challenging discussion, and I hope you will be able to join us.

For a link to a flier on this event, go to:

http://www.ride.ri.gov/Instruction/DOCS/CommonCore/DavidColeman-Feb29_Flier.pdf

I encourage you to share information about Mr. Coleman's visit to Rhode Island with other educators in your district.

From RIDE:

4. Opportunity to serve on the Test Security Advisory Committee announced

Please see the following message from our Office of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum:

Test security is critically important to the integrity of NECAP results. Without test security, we cannot be confident that our results reflect the hard work and achievement of educators and students. We want to be sure that our policies and protocols address the changing security issues that are emerging in our schools and classrooms. Therefore, we would like to convene a group of educators to advise us on how we might address these issues in our state.

RIDE is seeking to collect and share information about best practices for maintaining testing integrity. In an effort to formalize this process and to provide a forum in which test security policies and procedures can be discussed, RIDE will be forming a Test Security Advisory Committee. This committee will be a standing committee that will meet periodically for the purpose of providing leadership and direction in recommending standards and best practices in the area of test security and providing feedback on proposed testing policies and procedures. Topics of discussion will include prevention, detection, and response to irregularities in statewide testing as well as current and future test-security issues.

Committee membership will ideally comprise district- and school-level test coordinators, test administrators, principals, assistant superintendents, and superintendents. All interested parties should contact the Dr. Kevon Tucker-Seeley (kevon.tucker-seeley@ride.ri.gov, or 222-8494) no later than Friday, **March 2**.

5. RIDE to conduct needs assessment, focus groups on data use

Please see the following announcement from our Office of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum:

RIDE and its vendor Wireless Generation will be providing a year-long, job-embedded professional-development series on the use of data to drive instruction using Race to the Top funds. This rigorous, tailored training will be provided to district-level data liaisons and school leadership teams formed by principals and three additional educators per building. Turnkey materials for establishing data-driven practices will be provided and available to *all* educators to sustain this work at the school and district level.

To determine the most appropriate professional-development offering for each LEA, RIDE and Wireless Generation will be conducting a needs assessment with each LEA from February 27 through March 9. The needs assessment will ask LEAs and building principals for information on how their schools currently use data and how they work and plan collaboratively. For planning purposes, please be informed of the following:

- LEA representatives and building principals will each be asked to complete a Data Use survey. This electronic survey will assess current data-use practices as well as sources of data available at the district and school levels. The survey should take approximately 1 hour to complete.

- Building principals will be asked to complete an additional survey on existing collaborative structures. This electronic survey will help determine the extent to which educators are engaged in collaborative work within their schools; it is designed to be completed in 10 to 20 minutes.

To gain additional feedback on the professional-development series, RIDE will be holding regional focus groups on Wednesday, March 14, and Thursday, March 15. LEA representatives and principals, regardless of current data-use experience, will be invited to participate.

The results of the needs assessment and focus groups are critical to planning an effective Data Use Professional Development series. If you have questions about the upcoming needs assessment and focus groups, please contact Lindsay.Wepman@ride.ri.gov for more information.

6. RIDE opens registration for the statewide EPSS kick-off session

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

As we indicated in last week's field memo, RIDE is developing a computer-based system, the Educator Performance and Support System (EPSS), to support the Rhode Island Model for Educator Evaluation. This system is being developed in collaboration with MyLearningPlan®. With a goal of providing more information about the system, RIDE will be sharing EPSS's current status and functionality system with a statewide audience. This kick-off session will be held on **March 7**, from 9 to 11 a.m., at CCRI – Lincoln Campus.

Participants may register for the session at:

<http://www.eride.ri.gov/WorkshopReg/viewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=417>

7. RIDE to offer grants to help LEAs implement the Common Core

Please see this notice from our Office of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum:

RIDE is pleased to announce a mini-grant for Common Core State Standards implementation. All Local Education Agencies are invited to apply. RIDE will award four to seven grants of up to \$20,000. The application should further the LEA's strategic plan for Common Core State Standards implementation.

The applications are due at RIDE on Monday, **March 5**, by 4 p.m. Grant awards will be announced on March 9. For the grant application and instructions, please go to:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Division-EEIE/transition.aspx>.

Questions can be directed to Kate Schulz, at kate.schulz@ride.ri.gov or 222-8489.

Other:

8. Conference on innovation scheduled for March 13

The Rhode Island Public Charter School Consortium will hold its 2012 conference, on “the urgency of innovation,” on Tuesday, March 13, from 3:30 to 7:30 p.m., at CCRI Warwick, 400 East Ave. 02886. The keynote speaker, via remote access, will be Dr. Howard Fuller, professor of education and Director of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning, at Marquette University. The conference is free. For conference details and information on registration, see:

<http://richarterconference.com/>

9. Conference scheduled on high-school redesign

Three Rhode Island teams, representing Central Falls, Foster-Glocester, and Smithfield, will be presenting next month at the 3rd annual conference of the New England Secondary School Consortium. The Consortium supports RIDE in our work on developing and implementing the Secondary School Regulations that focus on multiple measures for determining proficiency for graduation and on multiple pathways. Please see this information from the Consortium on the annual conference:

“High School Redesign in Action” is the [New England Secondary School Consortium's](#) 3rd annual conference for high-school educators to share success stories, exchange best practices, and build momentum for secondary-school improvement that is focused on preparing all students for success in the colleges, careers, and communities of the 21st century.

When: Thursday and Friday, March 22 – 23

Where: [Four Points by Sheraton](#), Norwood, Mass. (negotiated overnight room rates available until February 28)

Who: Secondary administrators, teachers, and teams from across New England that are engaged in school improvement

Cost: \$75 per person (includes appetizers, beverages, breakfast, lunch, and materials)

Program: Click [HERE](#) to read the session descriptions

Registration: Online registration is available on the [conference website](#)

FMI: For questions and additional information, contact [Rebecca Vance](#) (207-773-0505)

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Commissioner/fieldmemos/default.aspx>